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QUEEN
ALTINER
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DREAMER
WITCHBLADE
DARKCHYLDE

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Dedicated to Sarah, my inspiration in everything.
RANDY

Witchblade created by Marc Silvestri, David Wohl, Brian Haberlin and Michael Turner

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I CAN FEEL IT START TO FORM AND TAKE SHAPE.
YES.
I CAN FEEL IT. ALL COMING TOGETHER NOW, FINALLY.
THE AIR SHUDDERS, PREGNANT AND RIPPLING WITH ARCANE ENERGIES WAITING TO LIVE. WAITING TO BREATHE. IT MAKES THE HAIR ON THE BACK OF MY NECK STAND UP.
IT'S ALL COMING TOGETHER, AND IT'S COMING TOGETHER BEAUTIFULLY.
DILIGENCE AND PATIENCE OFTEN REWARD THOSE WITH WHOM THEY ARE FAMILIAR. AND WITH ONLY ONE TRULY NOTABLE EXCEPTION, I AM A MAN WHO'S REACH...

...ALMOST ALWAYS EXCEEDS MY GRASP.

I SEE IT IN MY MIND.

I MAKE IT HAPPEN.

IT'S FANTASTICALLY SIMPLE, YET SEEMINGLY A CONCEPT SO MANY CAN'T QUITE SEEM TO WRAP THEIR LITTLE HEADS AROUND. A PITY, REALLY.

HOW SAD FOR THEM.

AND HOW TERRIFICALLY LUCKY FOR ME WHERE THEY WAVER...

...WHERE THEY FALTER...

...I EXCEL.

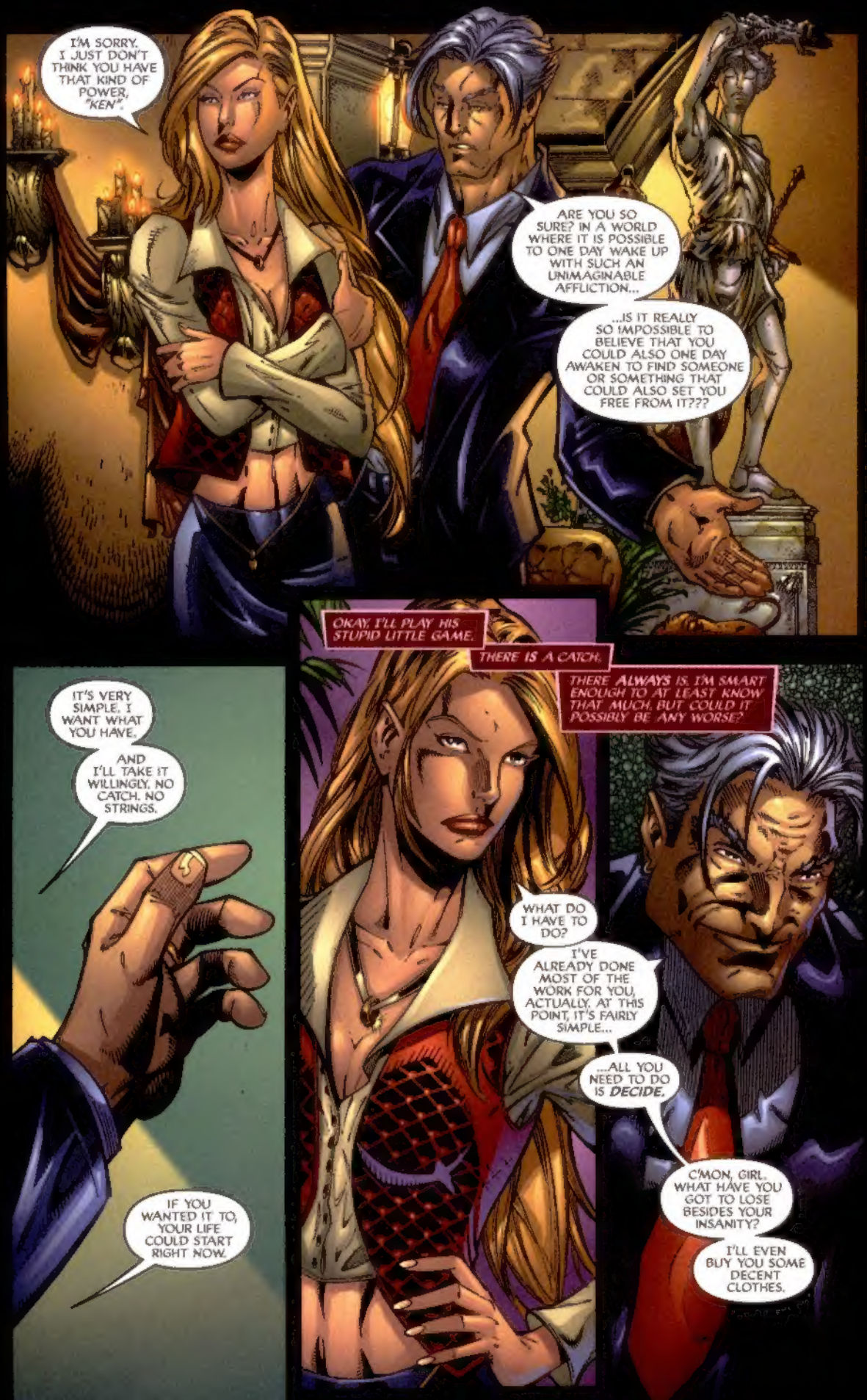
WELCOME, MY DEAR. MY NAME IS KENNETH IRONS, AND IT'S TRULY A PLEASURE.

I'VE BEEN EXPECTING YOU.

THAT MAKES ONES OF US. *WHY* DID YOU SUMMON ME HERE?!?

I BET YOU HAD NO IDEA WHEN YOU WOKE UP THIS MORNING, ARIEL, HOW INCREDIBLY LUCKY THIS DAY WOULD TURN OUT TO BE FOR YOU!
WOULD IT AMAZE YOU TO DISCOVER THAT I HAVE ABSOLUTELY NO IDEA WHO THE HELL YOU ARE, OR WHAT THE HELL YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT???
WHAT WOULD *AMAZE* ME, BEAUTIFUL YOUNG ONE, WOULD BE THAT IF THE THING YOUR HEART DESIRES THE MOST IN LIFE...
...TURNED OUT TO BE ANYTHING OTHER THAN WHAT I THINK IT IS.
THEN DO TELL.
LOOK INTO YOUR CRYSTAL BALL AND ENLIGHTEN ME, PLEASE. I'M DYING TO KNOW WHAT THE THING IS MY HEART DESIRES MOST.
WE BOTH ALREADY KNOW THE ANSWER TO THAT ONE, DON'T WE ARIEL? YOU LONG FOR THE DAY WHEN YOU WILL FINALLY BE FREE OF THE CURSE THAT HAUNTS YOUR SOUL.
TO JUST BE NORMAL.
TO JUST BE A GIRL.
WHAT IF I TOLD YOU THAT TODAY WAS THAT DAY?

HOW DO YOU EVEN KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT ME?!?! HOW DO YOU EVEN KNOW I *HAVE* A "CURSE"?!?!?!
PLEASE. DON'T BE COY, YOUNG ONE.
ULTIMATELY IT ONLY WASTES BOTH OF OUR TIME.
LET US JUST SAY THAT IF *"KNOWLEDGE IS POWER"*...
...THEN I'M DAMN NEAR OMNISCIENT.
YOU MEAN IMPOTENT.
TSK. YOU'RE QUICK, AND WHILE IT'S ADMIRABLE, IT HASN'T REALLY HELPED YOU RID YOURSELF OF YOUR PARTICULAR POISON, NOW HAS IT? BUT AS I'M TOLD, *"ONE MAN'S POISON IS ANOTHER MAN'S PASSION."*
I WILL TAKE FROM YOU ALL OF YOUR PAIN, ALL OF YOUR LOATHING AND FEAR...
...THIS THING YOU HAVE THAT'S BEEN SLOWLY EATING YOU UP INSIDE AND HOLDS YOUR SPIRIT PRISONER. THIS THING THAT KEEPS YOU LOCKED AWAY FOREVER FROM PURSUING THE THINGS IN LIFE YOU LOVE MOST. THE MAN IN LIFE YOU LOVE MOST.
I HAVE THE KEY, AND I CAN SET YOU FREE FROM IT FOREVER. YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE A PRISONER ANYMORE, ARIEL.
NOT IF YOU DON'T WANT TO.


I'M SORRY. I JUST DON'T THINK YOU HAVE THAT KIND OF POWER, "KEN".
ARE YOU SO SURE? IN A WORLD WHERE IT IS POSSIBLE TO ONE DAY WAKE UP WITH SUCH AN UNIMAGINABLE AFFLICTION...
...IS IT REALLY SO IMPOSSIBLE TO BELIEVE THAT YOU COULD ALSO ONE DAY AWAKEN TO FIND SOMEONE OR SOMETHING THAT COULD ALSO SET YOU FREE FROM IT???
OKAY, I'LL PLAY HIS STUPID LITTLE GAME.
THERE IS A CATCH.
THERE ALWAYS IS. I'M SMART ENOUGH TO AT LEAST KNOW THAT MUCH. BUT COULD IT POSSIBLY BE ANY WORSE?
IT'S VERY SIMPLE. I WANT WHAT YOU HAVE.
AND I'LL TAKE IT WILLINGLY. NO CATCH. NO STRINGS.
IF YOU WANTED IT TO, YOUR LIFE COULD START RIGHT NOW.
WHAT DO I HAVE TO DO?
I'VE ALREADY DONE MOST OF THE WORK FOR YOU, ACTUALLY. AT THIS POINT, IT'S FAIRLY SIMPLE...
...ALL YOU NEED TO DO IS DECIDE.
C'MON, GIRL. WHAT HAVE YOU GOT TO LOSE BESIDES YOUR INSANITY?
I'LL EVEN BUY YOU SOME DECENT CLOTHES.

ELSEWHERE.

IT'S WELL PAST BEDTIME IN THE CITY THAT NEVER SLEEPS, THE SHADOWS ARE GIVEN A LIFE NORMALLY CONFINED AND EXPOSED BY THE SHARP EDGES OF DAY.

SHADOWS THAT ARE SPLIT BY A PASSING, PROBING ARC OF LIGHT.

NORMALLY I DO MY INVESTIGATION AS PART OF THE TEAM, A PIECE OF A LARGER PICTURE, NAMELY THE NYPD.

THERE ARE OTHER TIMES, HOWEVER, WHEN I HEED A CALLING OF A DIFFERENT SORT. THE WITCHBLADE SHOWS ME THINGS, LEADS ME TO THINGS, THAT NO FLASHLIGHT COULD EVER HOPE TO ILLUMINATE, A DARKNESS IT COULD NEVER POSSIBLY EXTINGUISH.

THINGS OUTSIDE THE PROVINCE OF NORMAL HOMICIDE DETECTIVE WORK.

THINGS LIKE THIS LOVELY VISUAL TREAT SPRAWLED OUT IN FRONT OF ME.

SAD AS IT IS, IT DOESN'T EVEN SEEM TO FAZE ME ANYMORE. SEEN IT ALL BEFORE. ANOTHER DEAD BODY, A VICTIM OF HIS OWN POOR JUDGEMENT, THE COMPANY HE CHOSE TO KEEP OR JUST SOME SCHLUB WHO WAS UNFORTUNATE ENOUGH TO BE IN THE WRONG PLACE AT THE WRONG TIME.

HERE IT COMES.

HERE WHAT COMES?

RAAUUGHHH!

NEVER MIND. GOT IT.

OKAY, MAYBE I HAVEN'T SEEN IT ALL. BUT AFTER TONIGHT I'D HAVE TO SAY I'M GETTING PRETTY DAMN CLOSE.

ALLOW ME.

THE WITCHBLADE HAS AN AGENDA ALL ITS OWN. AND THERE ARE TIMES, LIKE RIGHT NOW FOR EXAMPLE, WHERE I'VE GOTTA TELL YA, I DON'T REALLY MIND.

SCHRIPPT!

SCHRICKK!

SCHRIPPT!!!

CORRECTION: I DON'T MIND AS MUCH.

ARRRGHHH!!

BRAKK!

BEHIND US.

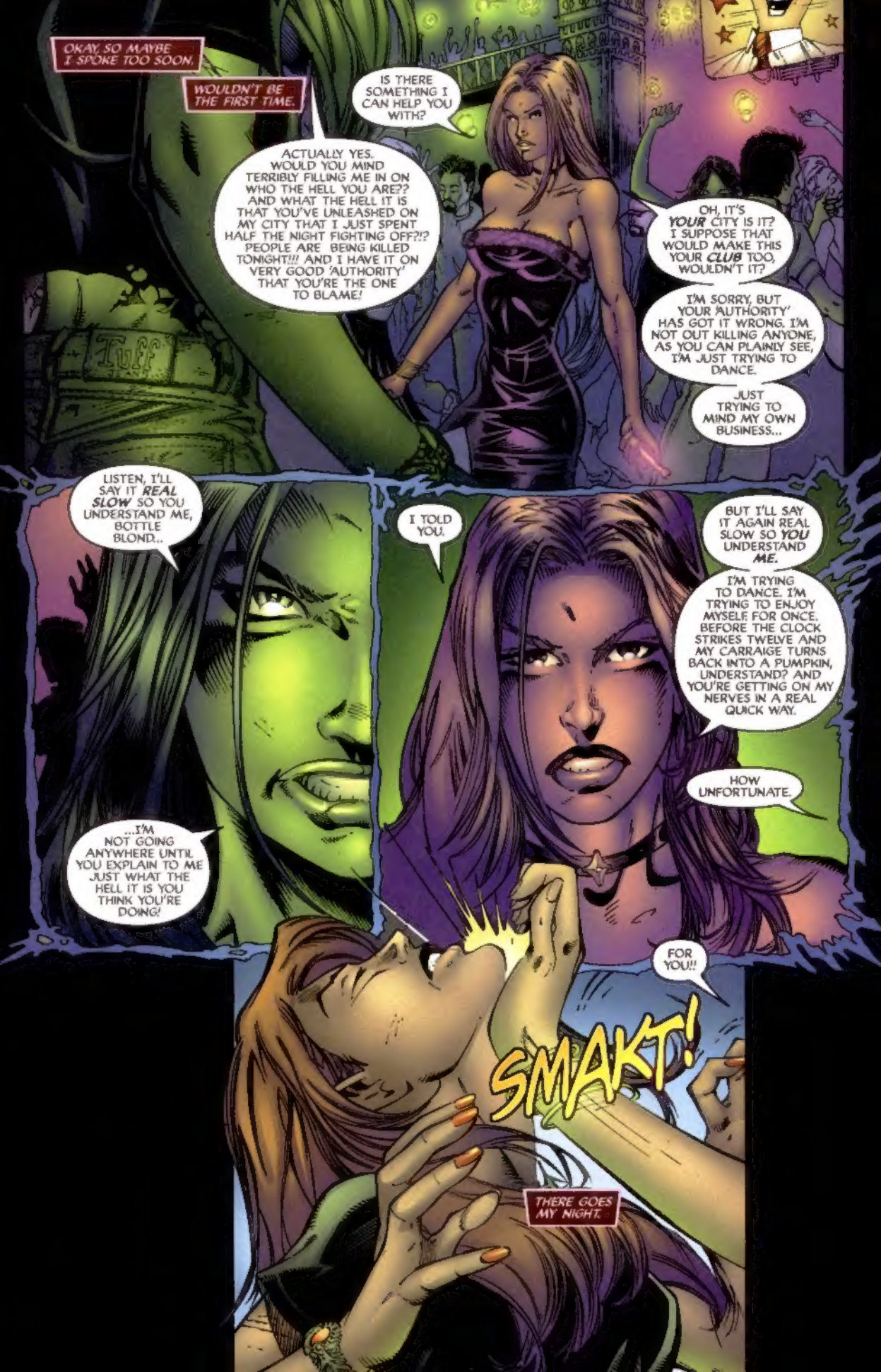
THERE ARE MORE.

THANKS FOR THE TIP!!

ANYTHING TO HELP

THIS NIGHT JUST GOT A LITTLE LONGER.

TEN TIL MIDNIGHT, THE "WITCHING HOUR".
THE CLUB IS CALLED 'EARGASM'. IT'S A FUNNY NAME, BUT I HAVE TO SAY IT FITS.
THE PLACE IS PACKED OUT WALL TO WALL, AND THE LINE OUTSIDE IS DAMN NEAR 'ROUND THE BLOCK. I GOT LUCKY I GUESS. A SMILE WAS ALL IT TOOK, AND THE DOORMAN PARTED THE VELVET ROPE TO LET ME PASS.
NOT USED TO THAT KIND OF PREFERENTIAL TREATMENT, BUT IT WOULD BE HARD NOT TO LIKE IT, OR TO GET USED TO IT.
GUYS HAVE BEEN CHECKING ME OUT ALL NIGHT.
HEY! COOL GLOWEY WATCH!
SHUT UP AND MOVE.
THE THUNDERING, PULSING BASS SENDS A CURRENT OF PLEASURE RIGHT THROUGH MY SWEAT COVERED BODY. I LET IT ENVELOP ME, SURRENDERING TO THE MUSIC, AS IF IT WERE MY LOVER.
I'M WAY INTO IT. THE LAST HOUR HAS BEEN A BLUR OF SENSATION AND PULSATING MOVEMENT.
IT'S AN ABSOLUTE JOY TO BE LOST IN SOMETHING OTHER THAN MY OWN TROUBLES. FOR ONCE, DON'T THINK ABOUT IT, ARIEL...
...JUST DANCE.
ABSOLUTELY NOTHING COULD RUIN THIS NIGHT.
ABSOLUTELY NOTHING.


OKAY, SO MAYBE I SPOKE TOO SOON.
WOULDN'T BE THE FIRST TIME.
IS THERE SOMETHING I CAN HELP YOU WITH?
ACTUALLY YES. WOULD YOU MIND TERRIBLY FILLING ME IN ON WHO THE HELL YOU ARE?? AND WHAT THE HELL IT IS THAT YOU'VE UNLEASHED ON MY CITY THAT I JUST SPENT HALF THE NIGHT FIGHTING OFF?!? PEOPLE ARE BEING KILLED TONIGHT!!! AND I HAVE IT ON VERY GOOD 'AUTHORITY' THAT YOU'RE THE ONE TO BLAME!
OH, IT'S *YOUR* CITY IS IT? I SUPPOSE THAT WOULD MAKE THIS YOUR *CLUB* TOO, WOULDN'T IT?
I'M SORRY, BUT YOUR 'AUTHORITY' HAS GOT IT WRONG. I'M NOT OUT KILLING ANYONE, AS YOU CAN PLAINLY SEE, I'M JUST TRYING TO DANCE.
JUST TRYING TO MIND MY OWN BUSINESS...
LISTEN, I'LL SAY IT *REAL SLOW* SO YOU UNDERSTAND ME, BOTTLE BLOND...
I TOLD YOU.
BUT I'LL SAY IT AGAIN REAL SLOW SO *YOU* UNDERSTAND *ME.*
I'M TRYING TO DANCE. I'M TRYING TO ENJOY MYSELF FOR ONCE. BEFORE THE CLOCK STRIKES TWELVE AND MY CARRAIGE TURNS BACK INTO A PUMPKIN, UNDERSTAND? AND YOU'RE GETTING ON MY NERVES IN A REAL QUICK WAY.
HOW UNFORTUNATE.
...I'M NOT GOING ANYWHERE UNTIL YOU EXPLAIN TO ME JUST WHAT THE HELL IT IS YOU THINK YOU'RE DOING!
FOR YOU!!
SMAKT!
THERE GOES MY NIGHT.

LITTLE GIRL, THAT MISTAKE I PROMISE YOU'LL REMEMBER AS BEING MONUMENTAL...

...AS SOON AS YOU REGAIN CONSCIOUSNESS!!!

UUUGGHH!!

GET THE HELL OFF OF ME!

YOU LITTLE IDIOT!!! HOW DARE YOU BRING YOUR *CRAP* HERE!! I'VE TAKEN DOWN BETTER THAN YOU IN *HALF* THE *TIME*!!!

WHAK

WELL...

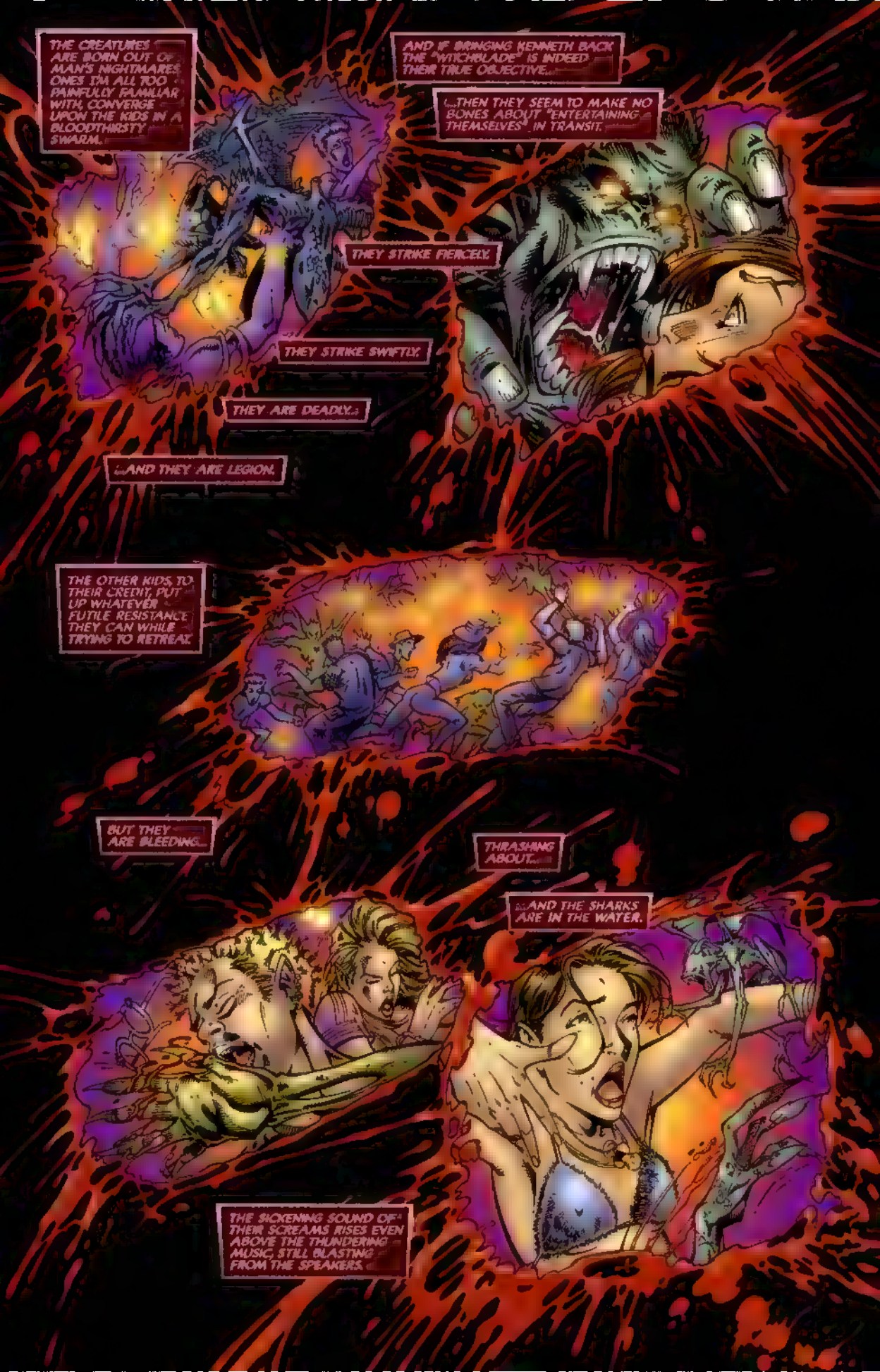
BFFOOM

THERE GOES YOUR AVERAGE

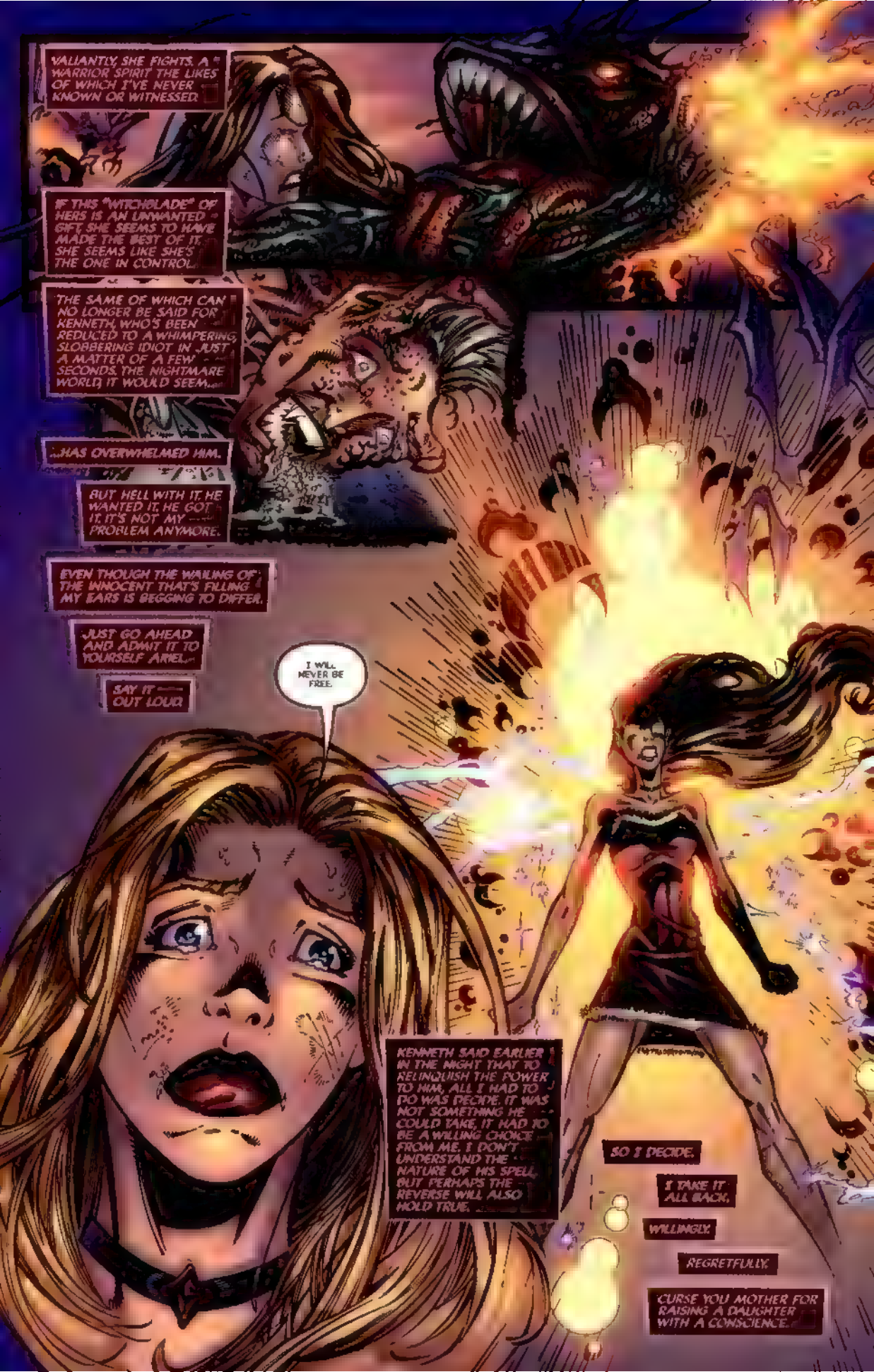
WE HAVE COMPANY.

HELLO AGAIN, SARA!
AS CUTE AS YOU TWO LOOK ROLLING AROUND TOGETHER...
...I'M AFRAID I *REALLY* MUST *CUT IN!!!!!*

OH MAN. I REALLY LOVE IT WHEN THINGS GO FROM BAD TO WORSE. IT'S MY FAVORITE.
TAKE HER DOWN, NIGHTMARELINGS!!! BRING ME BACK THE WITCHBLADE!!!
I GUESS IRONS HAS FORGONE SUBTLETY COMPLETELY. UNUSUAL FOR HIM TO MAKE SUCH A PUBLIC, BLATANT, STRONG ARM POWER PLAY.
MAYBE ALL THE BLOOD'S JUST RUSHING TO HIS DAMNED HEAD IN THAT NEW "INCREDIBLE BULK" FORM OF HIS, CLOUDING HIS IMPECCABLY GOOD JUDGEMENT.
EITHER WAY, LOOKS LIKE HE'S PLAYING FOR KEEPS TONIGHT.
BUT THAT'S OKAY...
...BECAUSE I AM TOO.
TAKE HIM DOWN.
SLSHNNN!!
SCHRRRPT!
SWMLDMMPP!!
OH MAN!
YOU KNOW THIS GUY TOO?!?
OH YEAH! WE GO WAY BACK!
EVERYONE BE SMART...
...RUN!!!


THE CREATURES ARE BORN OUT OF MAN'S NIGHTMARES. ONES I'M ALL TOO PAINFULLY FAMILIAR WITH, CONVERGE UPON THE KIDS IN A BLOODTHIRSTY SWARM.
AND IF BRINGING KENNETH BACK THE "WITCHBLADE" IS INDEED THEIR TRUE OBJECTIVE...
...THEN THEY SEEM TO MAKE NO BONES ABOUT "ENTERTAINING" THEMSELVES" IN TRANSIT.
THEY STRIKE FIERCELY.
THEY STRIKE SWIFTLY.
THEY ARE DEADLY...
...AND THEY ARE LEGION.
THE OTHER KIDS, TO THEIR CREDIT, PUT UP WHATEVER FUTILE RESISTANCE THEY CAN WHILE TRYING TO RETREAT.
BUT THEY ARE BLEEDING...
THRASHING ABOUT...
...AND THE SHARKS ARE IN THE WATER.
THE SICKENING SOUND OF THEIR SCREAMS RISES EVEN ABOVE THE THUNDERING MUSIC, STILL BLASTING FROM THE SPEAKERS.

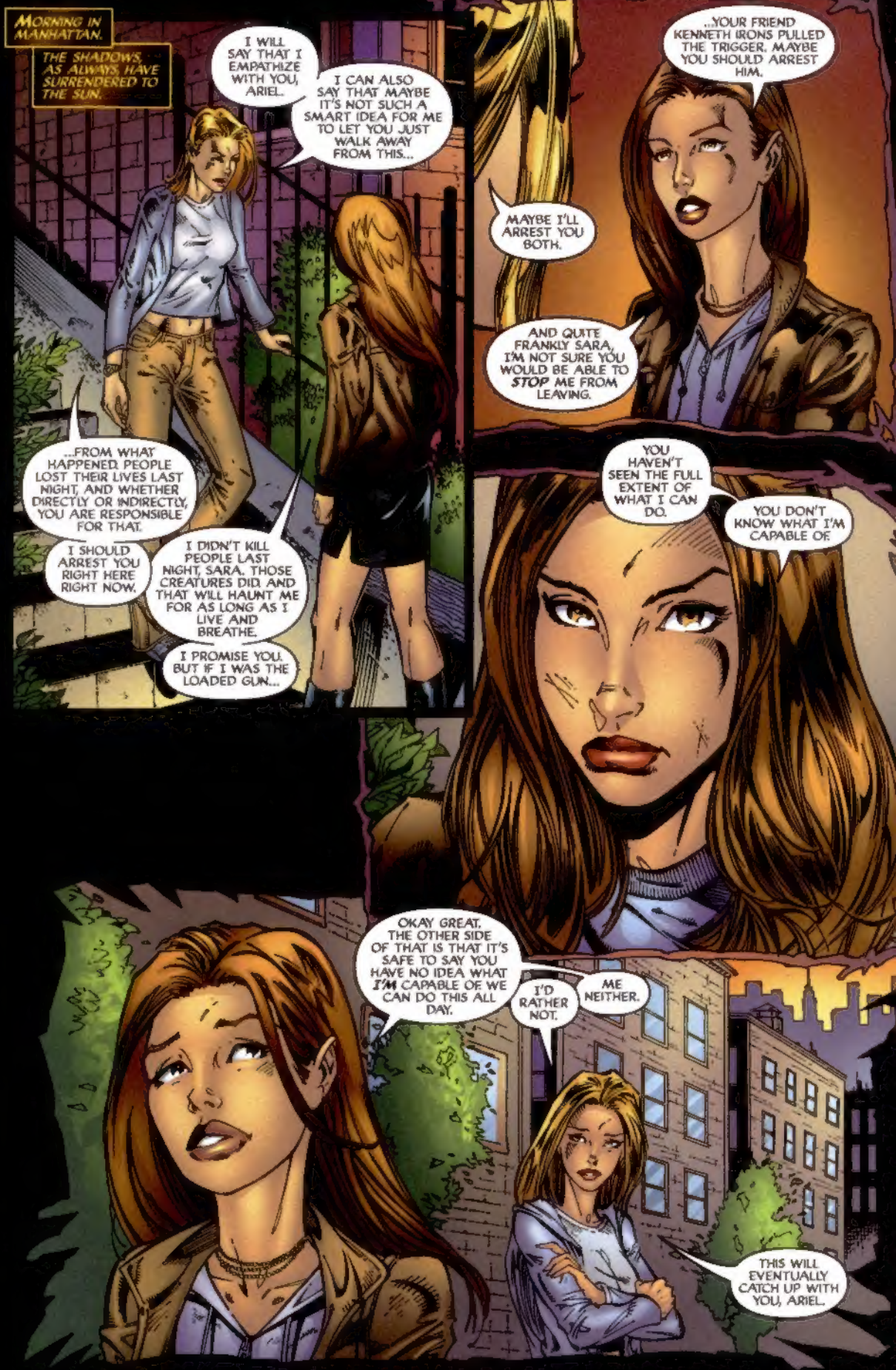
KENNETH HIMSELF EVEN BEGINS TO SHUDDER AND FALTER AS MORE AND MORE OF THE NIGHTMARE CREATURES, USING HIS FORM AS THEY ONCE DID MINE, TEAR OUT OF HIS BODY SEEKING ESCAPE.
SEEKING THE FREEDOM THEY LONG FOR HERE IN OUR WORLD, SEEKING TO NO LONGER BE HELD PRISONER, BOUND AS THEY ARE TO OUR DARKEST, MIDNIGHT DREAMS.
FOR THE FIRST TIME I AM ABLE TO SEE WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE, AS AN OBSERVER. I SEE KENNETH AS PERRY SURELY MUST HAVE SEEN ME.
IT MAKES MY STOMACH DO FLIPS THAT WOULD EARN GOLD MEDALS.
OH GREAT...
SPPPIFFF!"
...NOW HE'S FOAMING AT THE MOUTH.
THE LADY WITH THE "WITCHBLADE" SAID TO BE SMART.
I RAN FROM MY PROBLEMS.
TO RUN.
I DID THAT ALREADY.
BUT MY PROBLEMS, IT WOULD SEEM...
...HAVE RUN FASTER,
RIGHT BACK TO ME.

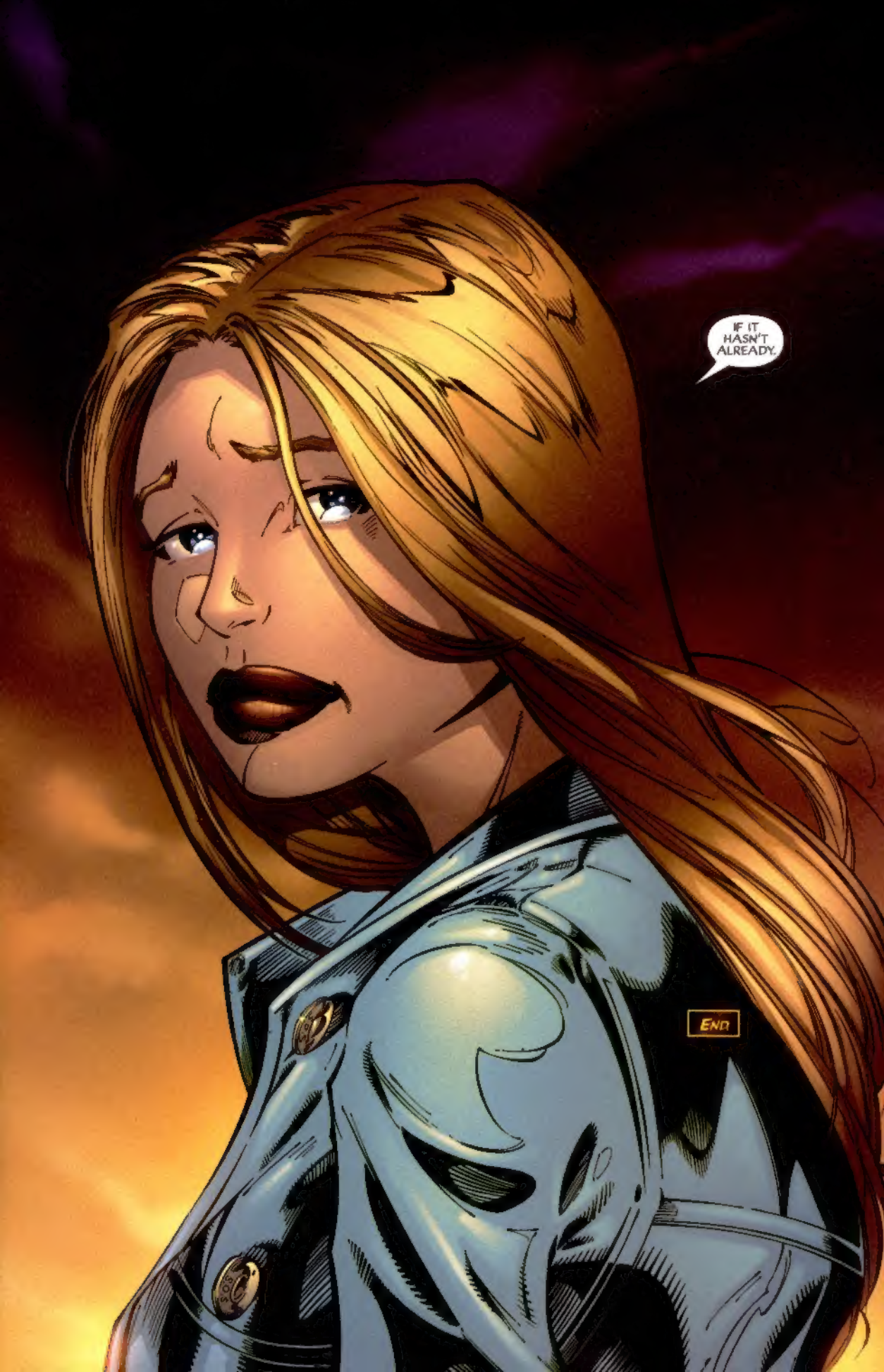

VALIANTLY, SHE FIGHTS. A WARRIOR SPIRIT THE LIKES OF WHICH I'VE NEVER KNOWN OR WITNESSED.
IF THIS "WITCHBLADE" OF HERS IS AN UNWANTED GIFT, SHE SEEMS TO HAVE MADE THE BEST OF IT. SHE SEEMS LIKE SHE'S THE ONE IN CONTROL.
THE SAME OF WHICH CAN NO LONGER BE SAID FOR KENNETH, WHO'S BEEN REDUCED TO A WHIMPERING, SLOBBERING IDIOT IN JUST A MATTER OF A FEW SECONDS. THE NIGHTMARE WORLD, IT WOULD SEEM...
...HAS OVERWHELMED HIM.
BUT HELL WITH IT. HE WANTED IT, HE GOT IT. IT'S NOT MY PROBLEM ANYMORE.
EVEN THOUGH THE WAILING OF THE INNOCENT THAT'S FILLING MY EARS IS BEGGING TO DIFFER.
JUST GO AHEAD AND ADMIT IT TO YOURSELF ARIEL...
SAY IT... OUT LOUD.
I WILL NEVER BE FREE.
KENNETH SAID EARLIER IN THE NIGHT THAT TO RELINQUISH THE POWER TO HIM, ALL I HAD TO DO WAS DECIDE. IT WAS NOT SOMETHING HE COULD TAKE. IT HAD TO BE A WILLING CHOICE FROM ME. I DON'T UNDERSTAND THE NATURE OF HIS SPELL, BUT PERHAPS THE REVERSE WILL ALSO HOLD TRUE.
SO I DECIDE.
I TAKE IT ALL BACK.
WILLINGLY.
REGRETFULLY.
CURSE YOU MOTHER FOR RAISING A DAUGHTER WITH A CONSCIENCE.

IT'S IMPOSSIBLE TO DESCRIBE.
THE UNIMAGINABLE TERROR OF IT. THE EXCRUCIATING PAIN OF HAVING THE CORE OF YOUR BEING, YOUR VERY SOUL, BLISTER AND EXPLODE, UNABLE TO POSSIBLY CONTAIN THE VIOLENT TREMORS OF AGONY SWEEPING OVER ALL THAT I AM OR EVER HOPE TO BE.
ALL THE HORRORS, BOTH PHYSICAL AND IMAGINED, OF MAN'S NIGHTMARES RIP BACK INTO ME WITH THE FORCE OF A HURRICANE.
IN OTHER WORDS, THIS HURTS LIKE HELL.
AND ALL I CAN DO IS SCREAM.
A WOUNDED ANIMAL JUST FIGHTING TO SURVIVE...

...BECAUSE IT'S WHAT I AM.
DON'T LOOK AT ME!!
THE BODY IS STILL QUAKING WITH THE AFTERSHOCKS...
MY SKIN...BUBBLING...SHIFTING...MUSCLES SPASM AND SHUDDER.
BONES SNAP, TWIST, AND REFORM THEMSELVES.
AND ALL WHILE SHE STANDS AND WATCHES IN SHEER TERROR.
REELING IN HORROR BEFORE ME, SOMEONE WHO COULD HARDLY QUALIFY AS BEING NORMAL.
SOMEONE SO TAKEN ABACK, THAT THEIR OWN PERSONAL HANDICAP, ALIVE AND GROWING ALL AROUND THEM...
...SEEMS ALMOST WELCOME BY COMPARISON.

BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU WISH FOR, YOU BASTARD...
...YOU'VE JUST MADE YOURSELF ANOTHER ENEMY.
OKAY. NOW I'M CONFUSED.
I'M CERTAINLY NO STRANGER TO THE CONSEQUENCES OF ONE'S ACTIONS.
CERTAINLY NO STRANGER TO A RELUCTANT RESPONSIBILITY.
OR UNWANTED. UNASKED FOR VOICES IN MY HEAD.
THIS IS OVER.


MORNING IN MANHATTAN.
THE SHADOWS, AS ALWAYS, HAVE SURRENDERED TO THE SUN.
I WILL SAY THAT I EMPATHIZE WITH YOU, ARIEL.
I CAN ALSO SAY THAT MAYBE IT'S NOT SUCH A SMART IDEA FOR ME TO LET YOU JUST WALK AWAY FROM THIS...
...FROM WHAT HAPPENED. PEOPLE LOST THEIR LIVES LAST NIGHT, AND WHETHER DIRECTLY OR INDIRECTLY, YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR THAT.
I SHOULD ARREST YOU RIGHT HERE RIGHT NOW.
I DIDN'T KILL PEOPLE LAST NIGHT, SARA. THOSE CREATURES DID. AND THAT WILL HAUNT ME FOR AS LONG AS I LIVE AND BREATHE.
I PROMISE YOU. BUT IF I WAS THE LOADED GUN...
...YOUR FRIEND KENNETH IRONS PULLED THE TRIGGER. MAYBE YOU SHOULD ARREST HIM.
MAYBE I'LL ARREST YOU BOTH.
AND QUITE FRANKLY SARA, I'M NOT SURE YOU WOULD BE ABLE TO *STOP* ME FROM LEAVING.
YOU HAVEN'T SEEN THE FULL EXTENT OF WHAT I CAN DO.
YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT I'M CAPABLE OF.
OKAY GREAT. THE OTHER SIDE OF THAT IS THAT IT'S SAFE TO SAY YOU HAVE NO IDEA WHAT *I'M* CAPABLE OF WE CAN DO THIS ALL DAY.
I'D RATHER NOT.
ME NEITHER.
THIS WILL EVENTUALLY CATCH UP WITH YOU, ARIEL.


IF IT HASN'T ALREADY.
END